

J.K. Gibson-Graham is a pen name shared by the late Julie Graham, who passed away in 2010, and Katherine Gibson, Research Professor at the Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University. J.K. Gibson-Graham co-founded the Community Economies Collective, which now hosts an internationally growing Community Economies Research Network.



## COMUNALIDAD

Arturo Guerrero Osorio

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*Comunalidad*, or Communality, is a neologism that names a mode of being and living among the peoples of the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca, and in other regions in this state located in southeastern Mexico. The term was coined at the end of the 1970s by two Oaxacan thinkers: Floriberto Díaz Gómez and Jaime Martínez Luna. It expresses a stubborn resistance to all forms of development that have arrived in the area, which has had to accept diverse accommodations as well as a contemporary type of life that incorporates what arrives from afar without allowing it to destroy or dissolve what is its own – *lo propio*. Communality appeals to the best of our peoples' traditions that has persisted, that of changing traditions traditionally so as to continue being who they are despite the pressures to dissolve, marginalize, or convert them into something else, that is, develop them.<sup>1</sup>

Communality is the verbal predicate of the We. It names its action and not its ontology. Incarnated verbs such as eat, speak, learn are collectively created in a specific place. It only exists in its execution. The We is realized in the 'spiral of experience'. We can distinguish three moments within it.

**Recognition/Exchange/Evaluation.** The exercise and understanding of the We are not epistemological activities but lived ones. They entail 'the recognition of the ground' on which one walks. 'You recognize yourself with the people on that ground. We recognize what we do and what we achieve.' That is to say, we recognize our potential and limit.

We recognize that our existence is only possible with the others by

constructing a We, thereby distinguishing ourselves from the Others. We open ourselves to all beings and forces, because even if the We manifests itself in the actions of concrete women, men, and children, yet in that same movement, all that is visible and invisible below and in the Land also participates, following the principle of 'complementarity' among all that is different. The communal is not a set of things, but an 'integral' fluidity.

After recognition comes an exchange of experiences, tools, and knowledge within the We and/or with Others. It is a 'mutual hospitality'. We harbour the Truth of the Other while the Other hosts ours. We encounter one another in 'sharing',<sup>2</sup> that is, *guelaguetza* in Zapotec, a communal aesthetic principle: to be with the other in key moments of life, sharing the experience. Homeomorphic equivalents of communality could be the Quechuan *sumak kawsay* and the Tzeltal's *lekil kuxlejal*. All are tilted by an ethic of 'reciprocity'. The exchange entails both rational critique as well as trust and faith. This learning culminates in an evaluation of the recognition and exchange that have taken place. It creates within us a new recognition towards another exchange and new evaluation.

**We/Orality/Sediment.** The 'We' is recreated first of all in the mental space of 'orality', the 'image', even if today these are mixed up with textual and cybernetic mentalities. Within orality, the We is produced on a concrete ground – *un suelo* – and under a concrete sky, which is a place where the bodies of all those present and disappeared are, each with the unique appearance they have precisely at the moment of recognition and exchange. *Guelaguetza* occurs on a 'sediment' of life and death. All that has occurred since Mother Earth was born is deposited there: it is on that bundle of traces where one speaks and listens.

**Everyday/Remembrance/Hope.** Experience lives in its duration; it is not measured by linear time. For the We, it is an extended present. In the everyday we remember, having the sediment as our grip and trigger. It is there that we shelter our hopes for the future.

The experience of the We takes place on the horizon of an 'inside spiral'. In it we distinguish two dimensions: 'Agreement' and the 'Root'. Agreement is the rationalization and verbalization of the root. It establishes the ordering of the We in its internal relations and with the exterior. Experience sediments itself in the agreement, and the agreement determines the experience. The norms establish the We's forms of sharing and sets limits to individualism and envy. From the agreement emerge the communal institutions of the 'assembly', 'cargos', posts or communal obligations, and *tequio* or collective labour for the common good, without remuneration.

The assembly is the form brought forth by the We to come to a consensus

and make agreements. It is ‘communalocracy’ that operates there, rather than democracy, between the different people that share in the We, instead of equal and free individuals competing with each other. In the assembly, the authorities are ‘named’ – not elected – ‘grievances’ are resolved, and it is decided collectively which common path will be followed. The authorities do not govern: they provide a ‘service’ as ordered by the assembly: it is the ‘leading by obeying’ of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN). The duties associated with positions of authority, like services, are carried out in an obligatory manner, without payment, and willingly – although normally people avoid them; they are onerous. One activity that the authority of each We organizes is the *tequio*.

By definition, the Root is invisible, unknowable. It is origin and sustenance. Jaguar and serpent. It is the communal myth, its horizon of intelligibility.<sup>3</sup> We sense the form of the Root and not its contents, since each community has its own which is different from that of others – with four directions or pillars. These are the mentioned recognitions: the ground, the people, their endeavours, and their achievements. In other words: land, authority, labour, and communal celebration.

Meanwhile, communality can only be understood in its relation with the non-communal exterior, which is to say, with the economic society. This is the ‘outside spiral’: it begins with an external ‘imposition’, which unleashes, or not, an internal ‘resistance’ and develops into an ‘adaptation’. This result is *lo propio* – what is one’s own – and the We.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I express my gratitude to Gustavo Esteva for revising this text and his support in situating it within the framework of post-development.

<sup>2</sup> Translation note: The author uses another neologism, *compartencia*, impossible to translate fully. Here it has been translated as ‘sharing’.

<sup>3</sup> Panikkar 1999: p. 45. Homeomorphic equivalencies are deep correspondences between words and concepts belonging to distinct religions or cultures; see <http://www.raimon-panikkar.org/english/gloss-homeomorphic.html>.

## Further Resources

Guerrero Osorio, Arturo (2013), ‘La comunalidad como herramienta: una metáfora espiral’, *Cuadernos del Sur*. 34: 39–55,

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## CONVIVIALISM

Alain Caillé

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‘Convivialism’, the term, emerged as the only natural choice during a conference held in 2011 in Tokyo under a heading referencing Ivan Illich: ‘Is a convivial society possible?’ Among those taking part were Serge Latouche, degrowth economist, Patrick Viveret, a leading theorist of alternative wealth indicators and Alain Caillé, editor of the monthly journal of the Anti-Utilitarian Movement in Social Science, *Revue de MAUSS*. One of the conclusions drawn at the event was the need to focus more on the points of convergence than divergence. A term was needed to refer to these commonalities. It was ‘convivialism’ – in other words, to be brief, the philosophy of living together, of conviviality. It was a way of paying homage to Ivan Illich.

Two years later, the name and the idea was gaining ground. To such an extent that Edgar Morin was soon able to write: ‘Convivialism is a key concept without which there can be no civilisation policy.’ Following a good year of debate, a booklet, the *Convivialist Manifesto*, was published in 2013, signed by 64 well-known French-speaking alternative intellectuals. The authors were located on a spectrum ranging from the left of the left to centre-left. Support from the right was also possible, as it was inspired by the view that, given the range of threats we were faced with on a global scale, only a massive shift in